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JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

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JOHN HOWARD LAWSON
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January 31, 1967

Dear Jay:

Your letter makes me feel that I did not read your manuscript with as much insight or sensitivity as I should have brought to it. The fault may be in part in the manuscript itself, but I feel that I cannot be altogether absolved from blame for not understanding the intent, the inner drive of the thing, even if this purpose is not fully realized. I feel it is not realized, yet I believe it is there, wrapped though it may be in detail.

The concept of broadening the study of film, to use it (as you say) as a lens for the study of a country's history and character, is necessary and I am sure you are well equipped for the task. (The horribly low level of film history or criticism in the U. S., resting as it does on a phoney aesthetic, has been evident to me (perhaps with some subjective over-emphasis) in the treatment of my FILM: THE CREATIVE PROCESS-- not merely that so many critics attacked it, but that they attacked it without the faintest suspicion of what it is about.

I feel that your letter states some of the problems, but also states certain limitations (as I see it) in your approach. Let me make three points: first, you speak of "aesthetics" and "sociology." You say, "sociology is probably dominant". I feel there is a danger in this, because it suggests a separation of the two approaches, and I feel that we must achieve an integral approach. Marxist thought has suffered badly in the cultural field from the separation, and a rather stuffy certainty that sociology is primary: art in the real sense, the creative realization of human potentialities, is primary, and I think this view of art (along with its misuse and degradation in societies which are not creative) is the basis for a richer approach.

Second point: the theme of "treatment of women," which you mention could, I think, be infinitely more revealing, and more realized in terms of film-- and through the lens of film, the whole social situation.

Third point: "Chronology" You are right that it must have more freedom-- forward and backward, but somehow the frame of reference, the reality of time, must determine the movement back and forward. The question of time is, I think, a central factor in cinema art-- and it must be so in your work.

All these problems face me in somewhat

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different, but related forms, in my autobiography. I have withdrawn it, after some mixed and very stimulating comments from friends, scholars and theatre people, and am reorganizing, cutting savagely, and carrying it through to the end of the thirties. B I expect to be at this revision for months and months and months. Eventually, I shall want and ask your advice.

I wonder if you heard of Jerome's death-- almost a year ago.

I was not aware of the photo. of Professional in Steichen's autobiography, and shall look it up.

Sue joins in love to you both.

*Best
John*

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